

APPLICATION

FOR

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SPECIFICATION

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Be it known that we,

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have invented certain improvements in:

“METHOD FOR CONTROLLING ACCESS TO A DATA
COMMUNICATION NETWORK”

of which the following description in connection with the accompanying drawings is a specification, like reference characters on the drawings indicating like parts in the several figures.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method for controlling access to a data communication network. More particularly, the invention relates to a method for controlling access to the Internet.

5 It is known that the increasing growth of data communication networks, such as the Internet, has led a very large number of users to go online every day.

On the other hand, the increasing growth of the data communication network has caused information of various kinds to be placed on the
10 network, with a consequent proliferation of sites containing data and information, as well as images, videos and the like, whose viewing should be reserved exclusively to adult users.

However, it is evident that the simplicity of access to a data communication network, such as for example the Internet, allows anyone,
15 and especially minors, who usually have a considerable time available, to access the network without any restriction, being able to navigate it and visit practically any kind of site without their minor age being protected.

Furthermore, the parents of minors cannot know which sites their children visit and therefore are practically unable to perform any kind of
20 control.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The aim of the present invention is to provide a method for controlling access to a data communication network which allows to distinguish
25 between network access requested by a minor and access requested by an adult user and then direct navigation according to the user's profile.

Within this aim, an object of the present invention is to provide a method for controlling access to a data communication network which, in the case of a minor user, allows to perform a controlled navigation, thus excluding sites that should not be viewed by minors.

30 Another object of the present invention is to provide a method for

controlling access to a data communication network which allows to tag the various sites according to their suitability or unsuitability for viewing by minors.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a method for
 5 controlling access to a data communication network which is highly reliable, relatively simple to provide and at competitive costs.

This aim and these and other objects which will become better apparent hereinafter are achieved by a method for controlling access to a data communication network, characterized in that it comprises the steps that
 10 consist in:

upon connection of a user to a network service provider, checking the data of the user who wishes to make the connection and comparing such data with a database in order to define a user profile;

according to the user profile, allowing free access to said network, and if
 15 the user is a minor, accessing said network with a controlled navigation step.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Further characteristics and advantages of the invention will become better apparent from the description of a preferred but not exclusive
 20 embodiment of the method according to the invention, illustrated only by way of non-limitative example in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is a block diagram of the process for the connection of a user to a data communication network by means of the method according to the present invention;

25 Figure 2 is a flowchart of the user identification procedure used in the method according to the present invention; and

Figure 3 is a block diagram of the verification of the Internet pages that can be performed by way of the method according to the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

30 With reference to the figures, the method according to the invention is as

follows.

The user, generally designated by the reference numeral 1, upon requesting connection to a data communication network by calling through his computer the telephone number of a service provider 2 with which he
5 has previously agreed an appropriate contract for the service, is identified by being asked a password and a user identification word.

The identification step is generally designated by the reference numeral 3.

At this point the identification procedure checks, by accessing a database
10 4, the information received from the user connected to the service provider 2, and identifies the user profile, ascertaining whether the user is an adult or a minor and, in the latter case, the age group to which the minor belongs.

The identification procedure operates consequently in two different modes:

15 if the user profile corresponds to an adult, step 5, and therefore has no restrictions to the network navigation, the access by means of the computer of the user 6 is unrestricted. Access to the network in this case is designated by the reference numeral 7.

Otherwise, if the user profile corresponds to a minor, step 8, access to the
20 network by means of the computer of the user 9 (who in this case is a minor) occurs in a controlled manner, designated by the reference numeral 10.

Essentially, therefore, the method according to the invention employs user registration means for accessing a data communication network, which can be identified by the service provider 2, means for authenticating the user
25 connected by means of the service provider 2, which can be identified by the identification method 3, and at least one database 4 which contains registered user profiles.

Essentially, the flowchart of the method according to the invention, which corresponds to the block diagram of Figure 1, is shown in Figure 2, in
30 which identical reference numerals designate identical steps.

Essentially, the reference numeral 11 designates the previously described step of registering a user 1 with the service provider 2, the reference numeral 12 designates a step of requesting access to the network, and the reference numeral 13 designates the request for authentication by the service provider 2, which is performed by sending, by the user, a password and a user identification word.

The step 14 represents the check performed by the service provider 2 as to whether the user 1 is registered or not; if he is not registered, the connection is terminated, step 15; otherwise the method moves on to step 3 for user profile authentication.

Finally, the step 16 represents the end of the registration step 11.

The controlled navigation procedure step 10 is shown in detail in Figure 3.

During this step, therefore when the user 1 is recognized as a minor, navigation is controlled and the list of sites requested by the user who is navigating is sent for example by e-mail to the parents of the minor user.

In the controlled navigation procedure, all the sites that can be identified as being accessible by a minor have an identification key, and all the sites that cannot be accessed by a minor are identified by a different identification key.

The method according to the invention therefore provides for verification of the existence of said accessibility key or, alternatively, of said non-accessibility key.

In Figure 3, the reference numeral 20 designates an inaccessible site, which is accordingly tagged with the non-accessibility key, while the reference numeral 21 designates a site which is accessible to minors and is therefore tagged with the accessibility key.

Finally, the reference numeral 22 designates an unidentifiable site, i.e., a site which is not tagged by any of the above keys. Essentially, once the user has been identified as a minor, who is designated in this case by the

reference numeral 1a, the method according to the invention provides, by means of appropriate software means 30, a step of identifying said accessibility or non-accessibility keys together with a step of disabling all ports enabled for credit-card transactions and the like.

- 5 If the site that the user wishes to visit is not tagged with the accessibility key, the page is not transmitted; otherwise it is transmitted but the site, i.e., all the pages of the site, are checked as a precaution for the existence of certain key words that are suitable to define the identity of the site.

If instead the accessibility or non-accessibility key is not present in the
10 site that the user 1a intends to view, the controlled navigation procedure 10 checks all the pages of the site in order to determine the existence of the above defined keywords.

Only if such keywords have not been found in the pages of the site can said site be considered freely accessible by the user 1a.

- 15 Essentially, the method according to the invention allows to verify the accessibility of a site directly at the service provider 2, who is able to identify the profile of the user who wishes to perform the connection and therefore to determine whether he is an adult or a minor.

The navigation procedure 10 according to the invention furthermore
20 provides a step 24 for sending the navigation report to the parent of the minor, as well as a step 25 of sending the navigation report, in this case anonymously, i.e., without knowing who the user who performed the navigation is, to an association and/or foundation provided for this purpose.

- In practice it has been found that the method according to the invention
25 fully achieves the intended aim and objects, since it allows to perform connections of users to the network, taking into account the age of the user and therefore, in the case of minor users, guiding navigation in a controlled manner.

The method thus conceived is susceptible of numerous modifications and
30 variations, all of which are within the scope of the inventive concept; all the

The disclosures in Italian Patent Application No. MI2000A002189 from which this application claims priority are incorporated herein by reference.